



Child protection

Example of information that could be given to staff and volunteers about identifying children who may be in need of early help

What does 'early help' mean in this context?

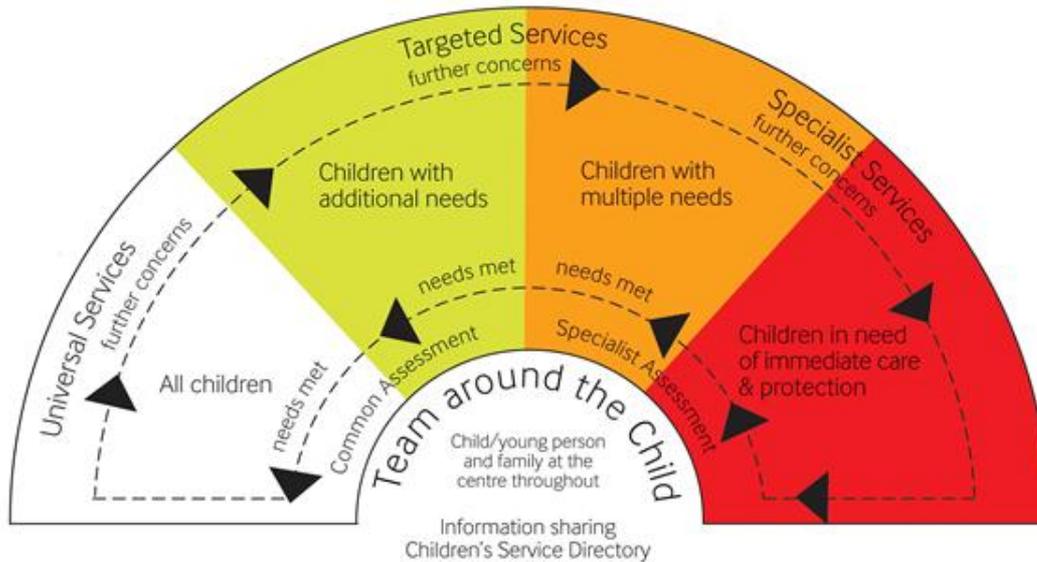
The Munro Review of Child Protection: final report – a child-centred system, published by the Department for Education in 2011 and written by Professor Eileen Munro, presents a strong argument in favour of preventative or 'early help' services for children and families. Professor Munro states that,

Services offering early help are not aimed just at preventing abuse or neglect but at improving the life chances of children and young people in general. 'Early help' is an ambiguous term, referring both to help in the early years of a child or young person's life and early in the emergence of a problem at any stage in their lives. Both meanings are relevant in the review.

In revising *Working Together to Safeguard Children, a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children* (published in 2013), the government drew heavily on the *Munro Review*, defining early help as,

Providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years.

This level of provision is similar to that which the previous government categorised as 'targeted services' for 'children with additional needs', represented by the green segment of the 'windscreen' diagram below. This diagram was originally developed by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families:



**Continuum of Needs
(commonly known as The Windscreen)**

Working Together 2013 pinpoints three stages in the early help process, all of which require local agencies to work together. They are:

- identifying children and families who would benefit from early help;
- undertaking an assessment of the need for early help; and
- providing targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family.

What are the indicators that a child and/or their family might benefit from early help services?

The Child Assessment Framework: a guide for practitioners, published by the CWDC in 2009 suggests that over and above access to high quality universal services, some children and young people have additional needs relating to their development, education, health, social welfare or other areas. It points out that,

These needs will in many cases be cross-cutting and might be associated with:

- disruptive or anti-social behaviour
- overt parental conflict or lack of parental support/boundaries
- involvement in, or risk of, offending
- poor attendance or exclusion from school
- experiencing bullying
- special educational needs
- disabilities
- disengagement from education, training or employment post-16
- poor nutrition or inadequate clothing
- ill health
- substance misuse anxiety or depression
- experiencing domestic violence
- housing issues
- teenage pregnancy and parenthood (including the risk of pregnancy and early parenthood, as well as actual pregnancies and parenthood among young people)
- young carers who exhibit additional needs which are as a direct result of their caring responsibilities, eg. truancy/lateness, ill health, housing issues

Clearly, these are examples rather than an exclusive list, and in many cases (eg substance misuse or mental health issues) may relate to problems experienced either by the child or young person themselves or by someone close to them.

What should I do if I think that a child, young person or family might benefit from early help services?

1. Make a note of the indicators that suggest that the child, young person or family might benefit from early help provision. These should include strengths as well as concerns. For example:

Jack has become unsettled in the group. He has been bullying other children and seems unable to concentrate on any activity for very long, saying that it is boring or that he feels unwell. He is reluctant to talk to anyone about what is going on for him, but his mum asked to speak to me yesterday, saying that she is struggling with him at home. She added that she recently separated from her partner after experiencing domestic abuse. She is concerned that Jack may have been adversely affected by what happened in the relationship. She is thinking about moving out of the local area to be nearer her family.

2. Discuss your concerns with your manager. Note that if they include a concern that a child may be at risk of abuse or neglect, then child protection procedures need to be referred to immediately.
3. If you and your manager agree that early help may be the appropriate route for this child, young person or family, make an arrangement to discuss this as a possibility with the most appropriate person in the family. Sometimes this may involve several discussions eg with the young person first of all, and then with their parent/carer. The discussion at this point should cover the following points:
 - You have noticed that there seem to be some issues at the moment which are making the child/young person unsettled or unhappy or unable to get on with their life. Does the child/young person/family (whoever you are talking to) agree that this is the situation? How would you and they describe the issues?
 - Are there things that are going on already that are helping? What are they?
 - What would they like to happen? What would improvement look like?
 - Is there a role for the group/organisation in helping to make things better?
 - One option might be to consider an early help assessment. Explain what this is, and that it can only happen with the consent of the relevant people ie child/young person if of sufficient understanding, and parent or someone with parental responsibility. Outline the possible benefits of such an assessment.
 - Check out whether the child/young person or family is aware of this having been done previously. If so, ask for details.
 - Check out which other agencies are involved with the child/young person and family.
 - Agree next steps with the child/young person and family.
4. Make a brief record of your conversations and discuss them with your manager so that a way forward can be planned.

Further information and support

For more information about the *Munro Review* and *Working Together 2013*, see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/munro-review-of-child-protection-final-report-a-child-centred-system>

http://www.safenetwork.org.uk/news_and_events/news_articles/pages/working-together-safeguard-children-guidance-2013.aspx

For more information about undertaking an early help assessment locally, see

(add local links in here)